

# Asian Elephant Conservation Fund



**Radio tracking Asian elephants in Sumatra, Indonesia.**

Credit: Frankfurt Zoological Society



In the United States, Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) are best known as familiar circus attractions. An estimated

16,000 Asian elephants are presently tamed and in captivity in the range countries. Historically, captive elephants were used for timber harvest, clearing forests and agricultural development. Today, very few countries use captive elephants as beasts of burden, and captive elephants in many instances face problems including husbandry and care issues, disease and exploitation. The destruction of forests, the advancement of agriculture and the encroachment of human development pose the greatest threats to the survival of Asia's wild elephants.

In years past, large herds of elephants roamed freely throughout the forests and savannas of Asia. Today, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants exist in the wild – more than half of which

are found in India. With mature bulls weighing as much as 11,000 pounds, elephants require ample natural resources to survive. Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water every day and each needs a “living space” of 80 square miles.

When sizable ranges of natural habitat are not available, elephants are attracted to commercial plantations and private fields of rice, cassavas, bananas, oil palm, rubber, tea, and coffee. Nightly raids by hungry elephants, coupled with frenzied attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy. In Sri Lanka, approximately 120 elephants are killed each year by villagers, and approximately 60 people are killed each year by elephants in connection with crop raids.

Poaching - the illegal killing of elephants for ivory, meat, skin, teeth, feet and bones - poses a serious threat as well. Only male Asian elephants have tusks. Asian elephant ivory is

highly favored, and centuries of targeting male elephants have left some elephant populations severely unbalanced with 50 females to every male “tuskless.” In parts of India, the poaching of tuskless males is shifting the male Asian elephant population towards the survival of tuskless males known as “mukhnas.” To combat these threats, the United States Congress enacted the Asian Elephant Conservation Act in 1997, which established a fund for the protection of the Asian elephant and the conservation of its habitat.



**Above: Female Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) with calves.**

Credit: Wildlife Conservation Society



**Above: Community fence maintenance team in Bhutan.** Credit: Mini Nagendran/USFWS



*The 2013 Congressional appropriation of more than \$1.6 million to the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund was leveraged by more than \$2.4 million in matching and in-kind funds to support 31 crucial elephant conservation projects in Asia including the following vital efforts:*

- In partnership with Asian Elephant Support, establish a multi-disciplinary team to build an innovative model to address human-elephant conflict (HEC) in Aceh, Sumatra. The team will compile and disseminate communication materials from a baseline assessment of HEC threats in target districts, lessons learned, and guidance for successful and sustainable human-elephant co-existence in an agricultural landscape. To increase the effectiveness of biodiversity laws, the project will establish a legislator network called Aceh Conservation Caucus and a web portal with information about laws, environmental issues, and conservation priorities.
- In partnership with the Wildlife Alliance, provide support for the Southern Cardamom Forest Protection Program rangers so they can continue their daily year-round patrols. Teams rotate to ensure coverage during public holidays because it is the peak time for wildlife and timber transports and traders expect ranger stations to be unattended during holidays.
- With support to Aaranyak, strengthen women's groups to be self-sustainable by scaling up and replicating successful livelihood models in adjacent areas around Manas National Park in India. It will restore community support for conservation of Asian elephants and other wildlife. This project builds on a previous successful grant.
- In partnership with the Center for Conservation and Research, create a change in stakeholder perceptions and attitudes on human-elephant conflict (HEC) mitigation and elephant conservation in Sri Lanka. The specific objectives include creating an understanding among stakeholders about the failure of traditional HEC mitigation and elephant conservation strategies and tools; the current scale and extent of HEC in Sri Lanka; future direction HEC mitigation and elephant conservation needs; and the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in mitigating HEC.
- In collaboration with FREELAND Foundation, sustain protection for elephants in Thailand's Thap Lan and Pang Sida National Parks. The project will provide sustainable professional skills development for rangers to safely carry out their jobs in Thap Lan National Park, Pang Sida National Park and Dong Yai Wildlife Sanctuary; expand park management's understanding of elephant (and other wildlife) population and distribution in the parks and sanctuary; and reduce human elephant conflict around Thap Lan National Park.



**Above: Asian elephant** (*Elephas maximus*) **in Kaziranga National park in India.**  
Credit: Mini Nagendran/USFWS

Asian Elephant Conservation Funding from 2006 through 2013	
Total Number of Grant Proposals Received	423
Total Number of Grants Awarded	260
Total Funds Distributed through Grants*	\$13,174,305
Total Matching/In-kind Funds Leveraged by Grants	\$17,390,483

*\*Amount includes funds from the Save Vanishing Species Stamp*

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